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COMMUNITY COMMITMENT IN SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Abstract

Special districts now constitute about 40% of all U.S. jurisdictions, yet little is known about them. Some critics are concerned that special districts and their staffs have insufficient community commitment. This study, based on a national survey of senior managers in large special districts, examines activities and programs of special district managers that foster community building and engagement, including correlates of these. Study results reveal that special districts are committed to their communities and several strategies and conditions are associated with increased community commitment, such as jobs that focus on community interactions, service type, and ethics management, as well as, to lesser extent, graduate degree qualifications and charters that specify the role of managers in promoting the public interest and in relation to the board.

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT IN SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Introduction

Special districts are increasingly common among U.S. public organizations, but still greatly under-researched (Cigler 2011). There are now about as many special districts as cities (about 35,000 each),¹ providing services in housing, transportation, parks, business development, libraries, water management, and others areas (Eger 2006; Foster 1997; Heikkila & Isett 2007). Special districts are often favored by policy-makers for providing services in efficient and business-like ways, but critics often question special districts' community commitment; numerous anecdotal accounts suggest nonchalance towards citizen participation, board membership that gives advantage to special interest business groups, and insufficient community orientation among district staff. Because the legitimacy of local government administration is grounded, in part, on its community orientation and community building, a need exists to better understand the extent of community commitment by special districts, as well as the administrative structures and practices that modify interactions between special district governments and their respective communities (Axelrod 1992; Bauroth 2007a, b; Bacot & Christine 2006; Beitsch 2005; Bordeaux 2004; Grossman 2008 ; Gulick 1947; Nalbandian 1999).

This research contributes to filling the knowledge gap in special districts. Specifically, this study addresses two key research questions: (i) through which practices do special districts engage with their communities, and (ii) how do management practices and structural characteristics affect managers' commitment to their communities? This research reports on a national survey of managers' providing information on community commitment by large special districts concerning a range of programs, activities and policies.

This study contributes to the literature by furthering our understanding of community commitment in special districts. The few studies that examine the issues of special districts have explored single geographic areas, or single community strategies such as only public hearings or citizen surveys (Heikkila & Isett 2007; Skelcher 2007), or other, albeit relevant matters such as legal and political issues like voting and voter input (Bauroth 2005, 2009; DeYoung 1982; Galvan 2006),² board composition (Bauroth 2009; Bollens 1957; Eger 2006; Eger & Feiock 2010; Mitchell 1997), and/or citizen choice and satisfaction (Tiebout 1956; Ostrom, et al. 1988).³ Systematic surveys of special districts are sparse, and in addition to considering a range of community activities, we also examine the impact of some management practices and structural characteristics on these.

This study acknowledges that special districts are notably unique organizations when compared to other public agencies as they are established outside of the traditional government structure to provide self-supporting or revenue-producing public goods and services, and are able to exploit complex financial markets with the public purse (Doig 1983; Eger 2011; Mitchell 1991; Smith 1974; Walsh 1978). Although special districts are wholly owned by the establishing government, they are legally distinct (e.g., they can sue and be sued independently of the establishing government), and their operational management is typically beyond the control and regulations applied to traditional government organizations (Eger 2000; Mitchell 1999; Pope 2008; Walsh 1978). Critics question community commitment by special districts insofar as they operate with dominant business-like values in mind, have fully or partly appointed boards that lack voter accountability, and have boards and staff whose members have strong ties to industry and little prior public sector experience. However, experience shows that these conditions are

not always wholly present; for example, a recent study shows district managers as having similar commitment to public values as managers in cities (Berman & West 2012).

Community Commitment

This study defines ‘community commitment’ as orientations and actions that further community building by public organizations. The term ‘commitment’ builds on the work of Berman and West (2012), who use the term commitment as referring to support for goals and values demonstrated by practice--the notion of commitment provides the bridge between values and empirical actions that support values. Community commitment by public organizations takes many forms, and typically is thought to involve community assessment, community involvement and community development (Agranoff 2011; Cottrell 1976; Goodman et al. 1998).

The term “community commitment” is also used in many disciplines. In urban affairs, political science and community development, for example, public programs and/or policies are often studied as evidence of a jurisdictions’ community commitment. Many public administration scholars advance an “administrative-centric” perspective that explores government attempts to incorporate citizens in developing, deciding, monitoring and evaluating government policies or programs (e.g., Wang 2001; King & Cruickshank 2010; Yang & Callahan 2007; Nalbandian 2005; Langston 1978). Some studies focus on a comprehensive measurement of local governments’ citizen engagement efforts, whereas other studies concentrate on specific participation mechanisms such as budgeting, performance measurement, and strategic planning (Poister & Streib 1999, 2005; Rivenbark 2003; Ebdon 2000, 2002; Franklin & Carberry-George 1999). Though different terms are sometimes used (e.g., community engagement, community capacity-building), a common theme is that the concept of “community commitment” (i) is frequently defined as practices, programs or policies that foster

community development, cohesion or support for public programs, and (ii) includes multiple dimensions that concern different aspects of knowledge, problem-solving, decision-making and action (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001; Glickman & Servon, 2008; Goodman, et al., 1998).⁴

This study conceptualizes special district community commitment in four key dimensions that reflect roles in knowledge-accumulation, decision-making and action; (i) community research, (ii) community involvement in decision-making, (iii) community-focused staff interactions with the governing board, and (iv) giving priority to community development. The second and third dimensions, in particular, reflect the fact that special district managers, staff and governing board are “knowledge bearers” cultivating close ties to their community. Together, these four dimensions describe practices through which special districts and senior special district managers and their staff engage with their communities (research question 1).

The first dimension, community research, is defined as objective and research-based understanding such as by staff commissioning studies about community needs and the impact of proposed policies or programs. This provides a comprehensive understanding of specific community issues and needs, and local history that helps establish policy priorities, understand constraints and facilitate responsive implementation (Lempa 2008; Parsons, et al. 1990; Stivers 1994). Some anecdotal concerns are that special districts and managers may limit their community understanding to only business matters (such as affecting service delivery and revenue maximization) and that special district management and staff often use informal information-gathering and decision-making methods, rather than research-based methods (Henriques 1986; Nunn & Schoedel 1997). The second dimension views community outreach, collaboration and buy-in as a foundation for success in governance initiatives (e.g., French & Folz 2005, Goodman, et al. 1998). Various authors (e.g., Botes and Van Rensburg 2000) discuss

the importance of including many sectors of the community before making major policy decisions, but Mitchell (1991) finds special district managers to be less attentive to process and community-participation, and more technocratic, focusing on business performance. An earlier study by Rosener (1982) finds that staff recommendation combined with the presence of citizen participation, are predictive of an organization's policy decisions.

The third dimension is community-focused staff interactions with boards, which keep board members informed of community interests and ensure that staff insights are reflected in board deliberations and conclusions (Ashworth 2001). Elected officials help ensure programs remain a community priority and receive funding and top-down support (Steiner et al., 2006), so the involvement of elected officials deserves separate attention. Managers interface with board members by encouraging board members to solicit community participation, and by examining the impact of proposed programs on different community segments (Heikkila & Isett 2007; Morcol, et al. 2008). The impact of different types of boards is discussed further. The fourth dimension focuses on actions that promote community development, such as policies and program that preserve the strengths of communities and help them move forward. Examples can be found in public administration studies that focus on one or more specific actions, such as intergroup relations, mediation, "bottom-up" processes of change, or coordinating groups to help the community achieve fair and balanced development (e.g., Westoby 2008).

This conceptualization identifies a broad range of areas through which special districts show community commitment. An operational measure of 'community commitment,' discussed further, identifies specific actions (e.g., "staff commissions studies that help us better understand the community") that managers and their organizations may undertake. Of course, these dimensions do not simply describe special districts, but could be used to describe most other

jurisdiction types as well, but they are of special relevance to these jurisdictions because of critics' concerns. The above framework is a strategy for assessing the extent of special districts' community commitment, irrespective of the level of citizens' participation within the special district, providing a direct appraisal of the special districts' perception of their community commitment.

Study Hypotheses

The second study question is: Which management practices and structural characteristics affect community commitment in special districts? We develop six hypotheses (some with subparts) that, somewhat uniquely, include not only concerns from within urban affairs and allied literatures, but also modern themes of public administration. Regarding the latter, we examine impacts of: (i) dedicated purposes and jobs, (ii) staffing for these jobs, and (iii) values clarification and strengthening. Although public-values commitment may be similar between managers in municipalities and special districts (Berman & West 2012), community commitment is affected by more than managerial public values; it is affected by both managerial actions and organizational structure. As previously noted, special districts are commonly organized as corporate in structure. While these characteristics provide a benefit to the establishing government, as the special district isolates financial risk, reduces the cost of financing, and removes debt or services from financial statements of the establishing government, these actions may also influence the community commitment of special districts since they isolate the special district from the direct political process which allows constituents to affect the behavior of government (Eger 2000; Eger & Feiock 2010).

The literature on the financial behaviors of special districts highlights the influences of the legal form, the degree of autonomy and power allowed by the enabling legislation, and the

role of the legislation in the control of special districts (Eger 2000, 2006). Given the separation of special districts, managers may perceive legal and political distance from their community as isolation from the community they serve. This perception of isolation can be reduced by having charters and jobs whose primary purpose is active engagement with communities. We hypothesize that community commitment is increased by jobs whose main purpose involves community interaction, such as working with citizens, community leaders or other agencies in the community. Employees who perform these jobs often hear about community concerns and subsequently disseminate this information to managers and others in the organization, and may increase awareness about the need for community participation, all of which are measures of community commitment discussed further. Sometimes, written charters exist which specify the roles managers to promote the public interest (Nice 1998), and we hypothesize that such charters may also prompt managers of special districts to increase understanding of their communities and involve local stakeholders. Such written charters also offer extra leverage to managers in their dealings with governing boards. Of course, some countervailing concerns are that charters alone may have little impact when not acted upon, and jobs can be isolated and marginalized in ways that render little impact. Hence, it is not certain that such charters and jobs as discussed above have much impact. We thus examine the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1_a: Jobs that focus primarily on community interaction in special districts are positively associated with community commitment.

Hypothesis 1_b: Special districts' whose charters specify the role of managers in promoting the public interest increase community commitment.

Successful special district managers are said to require competencies that “combine practical business skills with community knowledge and consciousness” (Smith 2008).

Community commitment certainly involves these, including leadership skills for engaging citizens, community leaders and other public officials. Graduate education is hypothesized to further community commitment by increased emphases on professionalism, ethical responsibility and decision-making involving complex problems that foster these orientations and skills, while public administration education additionally also emphasizes citizen participation, community development and public leadership (Bowman, West & Beck, 2010; Menzel, 1997, 2012; Yoder & Denhardt, 2001; Shareef 2010; West & Berman 2006). Indeed, Perry (1997) finds that professional identification by MPA students is significantly associated with commitment to the public interest. However, counter-arguments are that some graduate degrees surely do not address public sector complexities (e.g., in science), that professionalism is a double-edged sword which cuts both toward and away from democracy (e.g., by fostering a belief in technocracy. Perry, op.cit). It is also possible that some public administration programs may create more awareness than actual skill, and that appropriate orientations are not always pursued in practice. Hence we examine,

Hypothesis 2_a: Increasing professional graduate degrees in special districts increases community commitment.

Hypothesis 2_b: Community commitment is higher in special districts whose managers have public administration degrees.

While organizations have traditionally relied primarily on competitive recruitment and rule-enforcement to ensure officials' commitment to the community they serve, many contemporary scholars regard these practices/mechanisms as insufficient to acquiring and maintaining a community and public service-oriented workforce (Lewis & Gilman 2005; Svara 2007). Community commitment is a basic value (Menzel 2010; Thompson & Leidlein 2009),

and it is increasingly held that ‘values management’ is important in organizations to ensure that priorities are implemented. In recent years, ethics management is one of several direct ways of giving meaning to values, along with surveillance and sanctioning (Tenbrunsel et al., 2003). Though ethics management is sometimes misunderstood as being foremost concerned with minimizing legal wrong-doing, ethics management, with its formal and informal infrastructure, has become increasingly important for articulating and reinforcing activities that bring core values into evidence, including community interactions. However, while ethics management encourages responsiveness to community interests, some Codes of Ethics and Standards of Conduct caution public sector managers about direct involvement in local politics. In practice, local government administrators are already engaged in facilitative leadership at the community level, and for some it has become comfortable (Gibson et al., 2005). Hence, we (somewhat provocatively) examine:

Hypothesis 3: Ethics management is positively associated with community commitment in special districts.

Management alone may not fully control community commitment within special districts. Therefore, this study also examines ‘structural’ characteristics. The literature on the structure of special districts separates out service type for special districts into categories that include fire protection, utilities, other services (inclusive of parks & recreation, libraries, cemetery, and other single functions), transportation, environmental and development, and multiservice (Eger & Feiock 2010). Eger and Feiock (2010) show that the type of service provided confounds the financial behavior of special districts, leading to the structure of special districts as a contributing factor to the concerns of critics that districts give insufficient attention to community concerns. Direct services that impact a broad population and/or those which receive more extensive media

attention may require greater community commitment by special districts. Examples include health care (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996), parks and libraries, as well as highways, airports, and ports which often receive significant media attention as they affect regional and local economic development (Gillen & Waters, 1996), quality of life decisions and government objectives (Button, et al., 1995; Talley 1996). By contrast, services that are seldom in the news, such as water conservation, fire protection, sewage, utilities and cemeteries, and services that only impact a targeted subset of a population (Howard & Crompton, 1984), such as mental health services and jails, are expected to require lower levels of community commitment. Hence,

Hypothesis 4: Community commitment is higher among transportation, health, library and parks special district governments than other districts.

We hypothesize that community commitment varies depending on the size of the special district. Simply, larger special districts⁵ may have more resources to afford professional staff (Eger & Feiock 2010) and offer dedicated services, and are thus hypothesized to have greater community commitment (French & Folz, 2005; Mizany & Manatt 2002). In a recent study of citizen academies, Morse (2012) notes that “it is reasonable to assume that the rate of program offerings declines as the size of the jurisdiction (city) decreases.” Yang and Callahan (2007) also find a modest but significant relationship ($p < .05$) between size and the use of participation mechanisms. There are no studies in major journals that show negative associations with size. There is a different argument than that made by Dahl, who argues that citizens in large jurisdictions are less inclined to engage in civic participation (Oliver 2000). By contrast, we focus on efforts by jurisdictions that enhance community building, and it could be further argued

that tendencies toward lesser citizen participation in larger cities could prompt these cities towards undertaking even more efforts. Hence,

Hypothesis 5: Community commitment is higher in larger special districts than smaller districts.

Some special district governing boards are elected to their position, but other boards have some or all of their members appointed. A key question is whether the selection process produces different incentives for members affecting their community commitment. The literature on board member selection and community commitment is decidedly sparse, allowing for a wide range of arguments. Eger (2006) argues that elected boards in special districts are the most autonomous and thus are more responsive to specific constituent needs due to re-election pressures and desires, than appointed boards, but Frant (1996) notes that incentives to maximize political support may lead elected board members to accommodate the special interests rather than community interests. Regarding appointed boards, studies indicate that appointed board members in health services act as stakeholders for the communities they serve, with a responsibility to be committed to their communities (Roberts & Connors 1998). Studies of citizen participation in cities point more generally to the role of appointed and elected officials, and Yang and Callahan (2007) conclude that council-manager forms of government, which involve appointed managers, increase the use of involvement mechanisms, which Nalbandian (1991) and Ebdon (2002) also find. However, other citizen participation studies fail to find significant relations (Wang 2001; Yang & Pandey 2011). Based on limited literature, we formulate the following hypothesis (based on Eger's constituency responsiveness argument), noting that a negative relationship favors alternative arguments:

Hypothesis 6: Community commitment is higher in special districts with elected boards than those with appointed boards.

Summarizing, the main relations of this study are shown in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Data

To examine the community commitment of special districts, the authors conducted a survey of agency directors in 485 large special districts in the U.S. Large special districts are defined by the Census of Governments as those having annual revenues or expenditures of at least \$10 million or debts larger than \$20 million, and the sampling frame for this study is selected from special districts that have at least 75 employees (excluding hospitals).⁶ The rationale for the latter criterion is to ensure that the sample includes operating organizations.⁷ We refer to these as ‘large’ special districts because they are the largest of special districts in the U.S., although public organizations with, for example, 75 employees are not very large compared to other governmental jurisdictions. These districts were selected from a national list provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce; this is a national sample. We administered the 256-item survey by mail and respondents returned the completed questionnaire in a business reply envelope. We utilized the tailored design method (Dillman, 2007) with two follow-ups to help increase participation in the survey. The survey was conducted in the Summer and Fall of 2008. Our efforts yielded a 44.3% response rate (N=215). Table 1 shows respondents’ and districts’ profiles. The median number of employees is 221, and only 5.5% of large special districts have more than 2,000 employees.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Validity is an important study concern. We seek respondents’ assessments (perceptions)

of matters than can be empirically observed, and about which respondents are likely to be familiar as a result of their job duties. For example, we ask respondents to assess whether their organization involves many sectors of the community before making major policy decisions, and whether the executive director encourages discussions with the board about public participation. These refer to empirical phenomena about which senior managers are appropriate informants.⁸ We pilot tested the survey to determine whether questions were clear and unambiguous. Where necessary, survey items were revised based on pilot results. We assessed construct validity through survey items stated as observable actions, policies, strategies. Further, we examined sample bias by comparing the responses of respondents by title, addressees, length of service in their jurisdictions, familiarity with the performance of their organizations, age, and gender. While a few differences exist, they are relatively minor; for example, the mean number of employees in the population of large special districts is 533 compared to 499 in the sample. Notwithstanding our relatively high response rate of 44.7%, we also conducted a survey of thirty-five non-respondents to examine for possible bias among those who responded. We obtained their participation by calling them and asking them to participate in a shorter survey of ten items; most agreed as is consistent with our prior experience with this approach. Based on ten items, which we randomly selected from our survey, we conclude that differences are small and not significantly associated with community commitment.⁹ We also find no significant differences between early and late mail survey respondents regarding perceptions of community commitment. We do not see evidence of self-selection bias.

This study has some caveats and limitations. First, the sampling frame consists of large special districts. While the study results are generalizable only to other large special districts, large special districts account for 35.2% of employment in special districts, and the reason for

selecting them is that they *may* have adequate human and financial resources for engaging their communities. Second, our assessments are based on the perceptions of senior managers, only; others, such as lower level managers, employees or community leaders, may hold different views about the district's community commitment. Third, our measures of community commitment are necessarily subjective since no 'hard,' objective data exist about the topics under discussion. Despite considerable precautions to identify measurement errors, no subjective data are free from the possibility of some distortion and measurement error; measurement imperfections are embedded in the study concepts. Fourth, no study can assess all aspects of community commitment or administrative processes; quite obviously, choices must be made and we leave it for future studies to explore other aspects or specific strategies. Other caveats and observations are noted in the endnote.¹⁰

Variables

To re-iterate, a special district's community commitment is comprised of its community research, community involvement in decision-making, community-focused staff interactions with the governing board, and community-development orientation. We measure these dimensions with 10 Likert scale items (7 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree; please refer to Appendix A for the measurement of variables). Community research is the combination of two items, "Staff commissions studies that help us better understand the needs of the community," and "Staff commissions studies that help us better understand the impact of proposals policies or programs on the community" ($\alpha = .79$).¹¹ Community involvement in decision-making involves three items, "We have both formal and informal discussions with business leaders," "We have both formal and informal discussions with community leaders (not business)," and "Senior managers reach out to elected officials in the community" ($\alpha = .62$).¹²

Community-focused staff interactions with the governing board involves three items, “We help the governing board to evaluate the impact of proposed policies or programs on different segments of the community,” “The director encourages board discussions about public participation,” and “The executive director encourages board discussions about how we can best serve the community” ($\alpha = .80$).¹³ Community-results orientation is measured by two items, “We focus on helping the community move forward” and “We do a good job at preserving the strengths of the community.” ($\alpha = .78$).¹⁴ We also create a global index variable by summing up these 10 items ($\alpha = .81$). The above footnotes contain additional literature-based justifications for these measures. In addition to the use of Cronbach α , we employ exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine whether these dimensions are distinctive with each other. The results support our typology, showing that they fall into four categories.¹⁵

Regarding the independent variables, we present size in a logarithmic form of full time employees. Regarding service area, our data contain sixteen different types of special district governments. Libraries, parks, health organizations, transportation authorities, ports, and airports are coded as 1 whereas others are coded as 0.¹⁶ Enforcing ethics standards is an index of six 1-7 Likert scale items ($\alpha = .80$). These items include both static rules and dynamic practices.¹⁷ We measure professional qualifications by asking respondents whether professional jobs require a master’s degree. We also include the percentage of the senior management team with public administration (PA) degrees to further understand whether PA education is accompanied by the increase of community commitment. We use two dummy items to capture whether an organization has job positions for community interactions (with other public agencies and citizens). High internal consistency ($KR20 = .76$) allows us to combine them.¹⁸ Having charters that specify the role of managers is measured by two items related to board interaction

and promoting the public interest ($\alpha = .84$). Finally, we categorize board types into three groups: elected board, appointed board, and mixed board. We use appointed board as the base for regression analysis.

Results

The key research questions of this study include (i) through which practices do special districts engage with their communities and (ii) how do management practices and structural characteristics affect special districts' commitment to their communities? While both literature and factor analysis support that special districts engage with their communities through four different channels, descriptive statistics help us more precisely capture the extent of their engagement. Descriptive statistics reported in Table 2 show that community-focused board interactions is the highest (mean = 6.21) among the four dimensions of community commitment, whereas community research is the lowest (mean = 4.96). Community involvement in decision-making (mean = 5.79) and community-development orientation (mean = 5.88) are in between. On average, special districts are committed to their communities (mean = 5.75 for the global index). While it is commonly held that we should not be surprised that managers give high marks for their own activities, further analysis supports these results. For example, the 10 items are closely correlated with various performance indicators in our dataset. For example, respondents who score highly on these items also state that their organizations “develop new and innovative programs,” “have high productivity,” “and “demonstrate outstanding financial performance.”¹⁹

[Insert Table 2 Here]

We employ OLS regression to test our hypotheses. OLS models are shown for each of the four dimensions as well as the aggregate construct of community commitment. The

correlation matrix²⁰ in Table 3 identifies high correlations among variables, and we show regression results in Table 4. The number of observations in our models is between 150 and 155 as a result of missing values. Our dataset of 2,795 data cells has 104 missing values (i.e., $104/2795=3.7\%$), that affect about $(65/215=)$ 30% of respondents. To determine whether missing values are completely at random (MCAR), we conduct Little's MCAR test; the null hypothesis of this test is that data are missing completely at random, and our test shows that our missing values are MCAR ($p < .78$). Post regression tests show that the models for community-development orientation and community-focused staff interactions with the governing board were heteroscedastic. Therefore, we employ the Huber-White correction to address the heteroscedasticity; reporting our results with the corrected standard errors.²¹ We test for multicollinearity using variance inflation factors (VIF) finding a maximum VIF of 1.51, with a mean VIF of 1.21, indicating minimal concern regarding multicollinearity.

[Insert Table 3 and Table 4 Here]

Results in Table 4 show that the model of community commitment supports many of the hypotheses. Our hypotheses are stated with regard to the aggregate index of community commitment, and we find that community interaction jobs (H_{1a}), Ethics Management (H_3) and Service Type (H_4) are significantly associated with this index at the 1% level, while Charters specifying managers' roles (H_{1b}), Professional jobs requiring a MA degree (H_{2a}) and Senior managers having a public administration degree (H_{2b}) have support at the 5% level. Board Type and Size Type are not significantly associated with community commitment, and these hypotheses are therefore rejected. Table 4 also shows the beta coefficients so readers can quickly capture the relative importance of each variable. Table 5 summarizes this study's main predictions and findings.

[Insert Table 5 Here]

Our main analysis centers on the aggregate index of community commitment, but results for its four dimensions, shown as individual sub-models, provide additional analysis and specification. Table 4 readily shows that across the four dimensions of community commitment, ethics management is statistically significant in all models. It also has the highest beta value (0.34) in the aggregate model, and the importance of this variable is discussed in the next section. Regarding the sub-model “community research,” while other variables are not statistically significant at conventional levels, the variables “senior managers having a PA degree,” ($p < .064$) and “communication jobs” ($p < .057$) and “service type” ($p < .065$), are all $p < .10$ and contribute to model fit ($R\text{-square} = .21$). These sub-model results suggest that it is no simple task to explain why staff in special districts commissions studies that help better understand the need of the community or impact of proposed policies or programs on communities. The sub-models “involvement in decision-making” and “board-focused interactions” show results that more readily follow those of the aggregate model.²² The latter model also shows mixed boards associated with increased board focused interactions ($p < .05$), and we discuss this result in the next section. Regarding the model “community development orientation,” we find that the variables of ethics management and service type are strongly associated with helping the community and preserving its strengths.

The above results are based on 150-155 observations. Generally, as small samples have reduced statistical power, they provide a more stringent statistical test of hypotheses. Concerning the robustness of these results, in recent years, statisticians have suggested useful methods of imputation that can provide insight regarding the effects of restoring the effective sample size. For example, multiple imputation (MI), which uses at least five different estimates to provide

pooled results, is widely used in psychology and management (e.g., Acuna & Rodriguez, 2004; others).²³ Using MI, we impute 78 values in order to restore the available sample size from 155 to 194 (dummy and categorical variables are not imputed). We find that the level of significance of the IVs in the aggregate index of community commitment remains unchanged, and six variables in the sub-models modestly increase significance (see footnote).²⁴ We conclude that the larger sample size, using imputed data, support the conclusions reported above.

Discussion

A major focus of this study is to assess special districts' community commitment, and administrative and structural factors that strengthen it. Although survey data are always perceptual, our measures explore these matters from an empirical viewpoint. The mean score of the aggregate measure of community commitment is 5.75 with approximately 35% of the senior managers reporting a mean value of six or higher. It is important to note these positive perceptions of community commitment, precisely because of widespread concern about the commitment of special districts in various literatures. Our hypotheses focus on the aggregate index of community commitment, and findings regarding that are clear about which factors most strongly effect community commitment in large special districts; having jobs that focus on community interactions, ethics management and service type.

However, some factors have only weak or even no support in our data. First, we venture that larger organizations may have more resources or specialization that further community interactions, but we find little evidence to support this idea. Size is modestly associated with staff undertaking community research ($r = .26, p < .01$) and having community interaction jobs ($r = .17, p < .05$), but multivariate support is lacking and other bivariate associations are weak or insignificant (except service type). It may be that in our sample of large special districts, such

organizations already have adequate means for their community commitment activities, and while size does imply more activity and hence community interaction, size is also associated with transportation and other infrastructure related fields whose technical and sometimes bureaucratic operandi is less focused on community orientation, though such work surely involves a good deal of community interaction. Also, large organizations may have established processes relating to community commitment, and being larger does not necessarily change these very much. The relationship between size and community commitment is not necessarily a simple one, and likely mediated by some of these other considerations.

Second, we hypothesized that community commitment is higher among special districts with an elected board than those having an appointed board, but this proposition is not supported in any model. In the model of board-focused interaction, we find our only significant board composition effect: districts with mixed boards have a positive impact when compared to either elected or appointed boards. Although this outcome is perplexing given the limited literature on special district boards we find that a theoretical justification may be present. In Mitchell (1997), board members appointed by a legislative body gave a relatively high ranking to the representation of group interests, an indication that when legislators are given the authority to select board members, they often appoint people who will represent particular districts or constituencies. In comparison ex-officio board members, elected members serving on an appointed board, gave high rankings consistent with following the preferences of elected officials (Eger 2006; Mitchell 1997; Walsh 1978). In our mixed board measurement, both a focus on representation of group interest and elected officials preferences are present. This may explain our outcome for mixed boards, greater diversity of motivations and interests can be positively conducive to discussions about different interests and roles regarding community

commitment, complicating the ability of focal interests to dominate a board's outcomes (Andrews 2008; Light 2005). Anecdotally, we have surely seen this in action. However, our findings contribute to the discussion by showing that mixed board composition in large special districts has a statistical effect, however similar to Mitchell (1997) and Walsh (1978) the effect in the majority of our models is either minimal or statistically insignificant.

Third, we find that education matters, but not much. The predictability of professional degrees is significant, but only at the 5% level in the aggregate model; for example, senior managers having public administration degrees is associated with the index of community commitment at the 5%. Among the sub-models, professional degrees requiring a master degree is only predictive to board-focused interaction. One can think of many people with bachelor's degrees in special districts who pursue activities of community commitment, such as interacting with community leaders, for example. Professional degrees increase skills and knowledge which may have applicability to community interaction, but the application of those skills in organizations is surely mediated, such as by leadership and its priorities, for example.

Fourth, it has indeed become accepted that leaders must articulate values and give direction and impetus to these factors, as well. Leaders must work with staff to give meaning to them (Ashworth 2001; Liff 2007). Our study shows that processes of discussing and enforcing ethics standards and professional norms are often precursors to involving elements of the community and defining community-oriented needs and goals. Ethics management brings community values and troublesome interactions into focus as a topic of discussion. To repeat from above, "it is increasingly held that 'values management' is important in organizations... Though ethics management is sometimes misunderstood as being foremost concerned with minimizing legal wrong-doing, ethics management.... has become increasingly important for

‘values reinforcement’ by articulating activities and issues that strengthen the integrity of public purpose.” The importance of having such discussions about what organizations ought to be doing should not be overlooked as a means to increasing awareness. Anecdotally, from an educational perspective, many MPA program alumni have commented, years after completing their graduate program, that a course on ethics was among their most valued courses because it articulated the values that matter most and served as a useful guide to their decision making at various career stages (see, e.g., Light 1999: 109; Menzel 2012). Community commitment involves putting values into practice, and our empirical results are an important study finding and insight into practices that one book calls “the black box of government learning” (Blindenbacher 2010).

Conclusion

The two central questions of this study concern the extent of community commitment in special districts, and the impact of managerial strategies and other correlates on it. This study provides evidence about the largest special districts in the U.S., contributes a new measure of community commitment, and extends systematic research to these seldom studied jurisdictions. We find that community commitment in large special districts is high. Community commitment is higher in transportation, health, library, and park special districts than in special districts that provide other services. These outcomes are reported at a fairly high level, which is consistent with policy-makers’ performance preferences for these quasi-public organizations. Regarding the second question, this study finds that, indeed, several different administrative processes are working together to increase community commitment. The most important are enforcing ethics standards and value, and having jobs that involve interactions with community leaders, citizens

and other public agencies. Having professional degrees and charters that specify board relations are also significantly associated community commitment.

Caveats and limitations are noted in the methods section; we acknowledge that our study measures are perceptual in nature. Going well beyond traditional legal and political science foci of voting and board appointment issues, and using systematic methods, this study adds to the growing body of scholarly evidence in public administration that special districts play important roles. The time has surely come to take special districts more seriously as a focus of public administration research. Although we hesitate to make generalizations beyond the study sample, the relatively modest size of large special districts in the U.S. (only 221 full-time employees) suggests that the results may be relevant to smaller public organizations as well. However, we do find a need for further refinement and study. While we find that special districts are committed to their communities, the factors that have the greatest impact on special districts vary across the dimensions of this concept; the concept of community commitment can be further refined and explained in future research using other samples and independent variables. We also know little about the background of special district managers and how their leadership affects the community commitment of their districts. The findings regarding size and board composition surely merit further investigations, as does possible comparison with cities. In brief, special districts afford scholars a diverse set of jurisdictions that are understudied and provide opportunities for theory testing.

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Variable Relationships

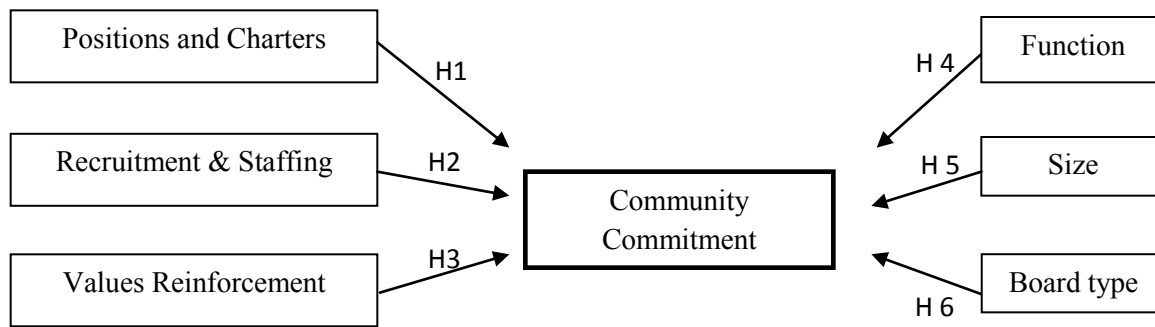


Table 1: Respondent and District Profile

Response rate—44.3% of recipients responded n=215

Respondent job title—73.8% are the executive director of the special district, 24.6% are director of administrative services, deputy executive director, chief of staff, vice president of operations, or HR director

Respondent familiarity with the performance of their jurisdiction—92.7% state they are very familiar

Respondent years working in present organization: 16.9 years

Respondents' characteristics

- Education: 92.9% bachelor's degree, 59.3% master's degree
- Highest degree: 27.6% in public administration, urban planning or political science; 32% in sub-fields of business administration; 11.2% in engineering; 6% in psychology, counseling or social work; 3.6% in law; 19.6% in other fields
- Age: 11.9% younger than 45, 29.5% between 45 and 54 years, 58.5% over 54 years
- Gender: 79.2% male

Special Districts' Characteristics

- Average number of employees: 499
- Average number of additional contract employees: 116
- District functions: 20.5% sewage and water, 16.9% housing and community development, 13.3% public mass transit, 13.3% parks and recreation, 7.2% public health, 6.2% air-and seaports, 5.6% libraries, 3.1% fire, 2.1% utilities, 6.7% multi-functional districts, 5.1% other functions

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

| | Items in scale | n | mean | SD | min | max |
|---|----------------|-----|------|------|------|------|
| <u>Dependent variables</u> | | | | | | |
| Community commitment index (sum-up) | 10 | 202 | 5.75 | 0.69 | 3.60 | 7 |
| Community understanding | 2 | 210 | 4.96 | 1.32 | 1.50 | 7 |
| Community involvement in decision making | 3 | 206 | 5.79 | 0.84 | 3.33 | 7 |
| Community-focused board interaction | 3 | 209 | 6.21 | 0.76 | 3.33 | 7 |
| Community development orientation | 2 | 212 | 5.88 | 0.94 | 2 | 7 |
| <u>Independent variables</u> | | | | | | |
| Community communication jobs | 2 | 211 | 1.55 | 0.75 | 0 | 2 |
| Charters specifying managers' roles | 2 | 206 | 4.49 | 1.54 | 1 | 7 |
| Professional jobs requiring a MA degree | 1 | 211 | 3.69 | 1.82 | 1 | 7 |
| Senior managers having a PA degree in percentage (0 = 0%; 1= 100%) | 1 | 185 | 0.12 | 0.17 | 0 | 1 |
| Ethics management | 6 | 208 | 5.91 | 0.83 | 2 | 7 |
| Performance management | 5 | 209 | 5.46 | 1.07 | 2 | 7 |
| Service type | 1 | 211 | 0.47 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Size (log) | 1 | 210 | 5.65 | 1.08 | 0 | 8.85 |
| Appointed board | 1 | 197 | 0.60 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Elected board | 1 | 197 | 0.32 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 |
| Mixed board | 1 | 197 | 0.07 | 0.26 | 0 | 1 |

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Community commitment index (sum-up) | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Community research | 0.76 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Community involvement in decision making | 0.76 | 0.43 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Community-focused board interaction | 0.70 | 0.30 | 0.46 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Community development orientation | 0.57 | 0.31 | 0.24 | 0.28 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Community interaction jobs | 0.24 | 0.16 | 0.22 | 0.15 | 0.13 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Charters specifying managers' roles | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.15 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Professional jobs requiring a MA degree | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.12 | 0.17 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.05 | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| 9. Senior managers having a P A degree in % | 0.20 | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.02 | -0.04 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| 10. Ethics management | 0.45 | 0.25 | 0.30 | 0.42 | 0.27 | 0.05 | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 11. Service type | 0.29 | 0.19 | 0.24 | 0.21 | 0.19 | 0.05 | -0.10 | 0.19 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 1.00 | | | | |
| 12. Size (log) | 0.23 | 0.26 | 0.16 | 0.12 | 0.03 | 0.17 | -0.05 | 0.12 | 0.04 | 0.13 | 0.32 | 1.00 | | | |
| 13. Appointed board | -0.04 | -0.10 | 0.00 | 0.01 | -0.02 | 0.06 | -0.02 | 0.03 | -0.10 | 0.19 | -0.01 | -0.06 | 1.00 | | |
| 14. Elected board | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.03 | -0.10 | 0.01 | -0.04 | 0.04 | -0.01 | 0.06 | -0.20 | -0.02 | 0.02 | -0.86 | 1.00 | |
| 15. Mixed board | 0.10 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.15 | 0.02 | -0.04 | -0.04 | -0.06 | 0.08 | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.07 | -0.34 | -0.19 | 1.00 |

$p < .05$ when coefficient $> .14$; $p < .01$ when coefficient $> .18$

Table 4: OLS Regression

| | Aggregate Index: | | Four Sub-Models | | | |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| | Community commitment | Community research | Involvement in decision making | Board-focused interaction | Development orientation | |
| | Coef (Beta) | Coef (Beta) | Coef (Beta) | Coef (Beta) | Coef (Beta) | |
| Community interaction jobs | 0.19 (0.22)** | 0.25 (0.15) | 0.18 (0.17)* | 0.13 (0.13) | 0.13 (0.10) | |
| Charters specifying managers' roles | 0.07 (0.16)* | 0.10 (0.12) | 0.09 (0.17)* | 0.07 (0.14) | 0.00 (0.00) | |
| Professional jobs requiring a MA degree | 0.06 (0.15)* | 0.08 (0.11) | 0.02 (0.04) | 0.07 (0.16)* | 0.03 (0.05) | |
| Senior managers having a PA degree | 0.63 (0.16)* | 1.02 (0.14) | 0.62 (0.13) | 0.32 (0.08) | 0.23 (0.04) | |
| Ethics management | 0.28 (0.34)** | 0.26 (0.16)* | 0.21 (0.21)** | 0.31 (0.33)** | 0.29 (0.25)** | |
| Service type | 0.35 (0.25)** | 0.40 (0.15) | 0.44 (0.26)** | 0.27 (0.17)* | 0.50 (0.26)** | |
| Size (log) | 0.04 (0.05) | 0.19 (0.14) | 0.05 (0.06) | -0.02 (-0.02) | -0.11 (-0.11) | |
| Elected board | 0.09 (0.06) | 0.26 (0.09) | -0.02 (-0.01) | -0.06 (-0.03) | 0.16 (0.08) | |
| Mixed board | 0.28 (0.11) | 0.23 (0.05) | 0.05 (0.02) | 0.41 (0.15)* | 0.09 (0.03) | |
| Constant | 2.75 | 0.91 | 3.21 | 0.41* | 4.16** | |
| n | 150 | 155 | 151 | 155 | 155 | |
| R square | 0.42 | 0.21 | 0.26 | 0.27 | 0.15 | |
| Adjusted R square | 0.38 | 0.16 | 0.21 | 0.23 | 0.10 | |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 5: Summary of Results

| Hypothesis | | Prediction | Results (Full Model) |
|-----------------|---|------------|-------------------------|
| H _{1a} | Community interaction jobs | + | Supported |
| H _{1b} | Charters specifying managers' roles | + | Supported |
| H _{2a} | Professional jobs requiring a MA degree | + | Supported |
| H _{2b} | Senior managers having a PA degree | + | Supported |
| H ₃ | Ethics management | + | Supported |
| H ₄ | Service type | + | Supported |
| H ₅ | Organizational size | + | Rejected |
| H ₆ | Elected boards | + | Rejected |

Appendix A Variable Measurement

DVs: Community Commitment in Special Districts

Community Research (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.79)

- Staff commissions studies that help us better understand the needs of the community
- Staff commissions studies that help us better understand the impact of proposed policies or programs on the community

Community Involvement in Decision-Making (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.62)

- We have both formal and informal discussions with business leaders
- We have both formal and informal discussions with community leaders (not business)
- Senior managers reach out to elected officials in the community

Community-Focused Board Interactions (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.80)

- We help the governing board to evaluate the impact of proposed policies or programs on different segments of the community
- The executive director encourages board discussions about public participation
- The executive director encourages board discussions about how we can best serve the community

Community-Development Orientation (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.78)

- We focus on helping the community move forward
- We do a good job at preserving the strengths of the community

Global Community Commitment (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.81)

IVs: Antecedents of Community-Orientation in Special Districts

Ethics Management (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.80)

- We have a code of ethics
- We have a code of conduct
- We have an active program to enforce ethics standards among managers and employees
- We have extensive practices to provide openness and transparency in all our administrative decisions and practices
- Unethical conducts are dealt with harshly
- Our organization strongly promotes professional norms

Community Interaction Positions (0 = No; 1 = Yes; κ -20=.76)

- Our organization has jobs whose main purpose is coordinating with other public agencies
- Our organization has jobs whose main purpose is working with citizens and community leaders

Charter (7= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree; alpha=.84)

- The charter adequately specifies the role of managers in relation to the board
- The charter adequately specifies the role of managers in promoting the public interest

Qualifications (not combined)

- Percentage of senior management team with PA degrees
- Many professional jobs in our organization require a master's degree (7= Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree)

Organization Size: (log) number of full-time employees

Service type: Libraries, parks, health organizations, transportation authorities, ports, and airports = 1; others = 0

Board type: Elected board; appointed board; mixed board (3 dummy variables)

Endnotes

¹ Specifically, there are 35,356 special districts and 35,937 municipalities and townships according to the latest decennial Census of 2002. This is up from 20% of governmental units in the 1970s, and 10% in the 1950s (12,340 in 1952).

² Also Burns 1994; Hamilton 1988; Hankerson 1956; Manson 1987; McDowell and Ugone 1982

³ Other systematic research on special districts, while growing, deals with other matters such as job satisfaction, local boundary change, governing arrangements, district incorporation and dissolution (Bauroth 2009; Beitsch 2005; Feiock & Carr 2001; West & Berman 2009).

⁴ Relevant examples of literature in community development and policy studies include Conroy & Berke 2004, Beebe et al. 2001, Shepherd & Rothenbuhler 2001 and Hunter & Staggenborg 1986. Within public administration, “community commitment” is also part of such broader constructs as public service motivation and ‘publicness.’ This study, and its measures, focus on specific activities mentioned in the text.

⁵ ‘Large’ refers to the organization, such as by number of employees or budget, rather than the geographic size of service area.

⁶ Hospitals are excluded because individual patient health care may not be foremost affected by community values explored here. Even though some public hospitals also have broad, community-based public health roles, these are but a fraction of total operations. This study does include organizations whose primary focus is public health. Also, as defined by the census, the term “special district governments” excludes school district governments (U.S. Census 2002).

⁷ A reason for studying operating organizations is that our interests and survey items include organizations having jobs whose main purpose is coordinating with other public agencies or working with citizens and community leaders. Large operating organizations are more likely to have such jobs on account of direct contacts with citizens and task specialization, than smaller organizations that lack resources, staff or specialization (Carver, 1973; Christenson & Sachs, 1980; DeHoog, Lowery & Lyons, 1990; Lyons & Lowery, 1989). However, none of this should be taken to imply that smaller organizations or those with less staff could not have such jobs; indeed, it is conceivable that a special district which contracts for its service delivery chooses to have such positions in support of its management/policy functions. The extent of such possibilities is both beyond knowledge and our study population. Our study conclusions are limited to the study population, and we hope that future studies might examine such issues in other study populations.

⁸ As so little has been systematically researched about special districts, it seems reasonable to us to study top managers who are customarily assumed to have a broad overview of their organizations’ activities. This is analogous to why many studies of local government survey city managers. Also, some questions concern interactions with the board about which they are assumed to be knowledgeable based on their responsibilities.

⁹ We follow Whitehead et al. (1993) analysis for non-response bias. Non-respondents were contacted by phone. For example, respondents and non-respondents do not vary much by how many years they have worked in their organization (16.9 versus 15.1 years, $p > .05$), nor do they vary in perceptions of the importance of accountability to the governing board (very important or important: 77.6 % versus 80.0%, p

> .05), or helping the board to assess the impact of program and policies and segment of the community (strongly agree or agree: 91.0% versus 94.3%, $p > .05$).

¹⁰ Very few of the special districts are multi-purpose; over 90% are single purpose. Another caveat is that this article focuses broadly on community commitment, district functions, human resource management and organizational performance, rather than focusing in-depth on any one of these areas. This study is grounded in public administration and does not address typical concerns of political science such as voting, community politics, and so on.

¹¹ This is supported by Goodman et al. (1998) and Rosener (1982), discussed in the text, earlier.

¹² Botes and Van Rensburg (2000) note “selective participatory practices can be avoided when development workers seek out various sets of interest rather than listening only to a few community leaders and prominent figures” (p.53).”

¹³ A smooth interaction between board and executive directors is a key factor of board effectiveness (Herman & Renz, 2004). Board practices should include whether executive officers provide suggestions or reactions regarding missions and community interests in nonprofit board governance.

¹⁴ Contemporary community development literature covers community-development orientation items selected in the current study. Botes and Van Rensburg (2000), for example, suggest that those who want to get involved in community development should respect the community’s indigenous contribution as manifested in their knowledge and guard against the domination of some interest groups. In addition, they should also serve as good facilitators and catalysts of development that assist and stimulate the community to move forward.

¹⁵ We use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on our 10 items, and find that four factors are present. One item, “Senior Managers reach out to elected officials in the community” loads moderately, at 0.40, on the construct community involvement, and all other items load at 0.72 or greater on each of the constructs. We choose to use index variables (sum-up items) instead of saved factor scores due to the following reasons. First, variables designed to measure these four dimensions are well grounded in existing literature. Since they are conceptually distinctive, Cronbach’s alpha and sum-up indices are as appropriate as factor scores. Second, it is easier to interpret index variables than factor scores (For example, it is sensible to state “having a job handling community interaction increases 0.22 of community commitment,” but not “having a job handling community interaction increases 0.13 of factor score. Third, we investigate how independent variables used in this study predict “general community commitment” which sums up all 10 dependent variable items. Finally, scholars often use index variables when distinctive factors as determined by EFA are available, such as those who study public service motivation (PSM. e.g. Moynihan & Pandey, 2007).

¹⁶ Other types of special district governments include the following functions: utility, housing, water preservation, river, fire protection, civic center, parking, jail, and road sanitation.

¹⁷ The items of “We have a code of ethics” and “We have a code of conduct” have been widely used in the studies of organizational ethics (e.g. Laouris, Laouri, & Christakis, 2008). We also consider whether an organization promotes professional norms to the extent that “a profession's code of ethics is perhaps its most visible and explicit enunciation of its professional norms” (Frankel, 1989). In studying codes of ethics, Palidauskaite (2006) asserts that transparency and openness are the core principles of public service, so we consider whether organizations “have extensive practices to provide openness and transparency in all our administrative decisions and practices.” Finally, “We have an active program to

enforce ethics standards” and “Unethical conducts are dealt with harshly” concern whether dynamic practices of ethics management exist in an organization. Koh and Boo (2001) employed conceptually similar items such as “Top management in my organization has clearly conveyed that unethical behavior will not be tolerated” and “If a manager in my organization is discovered to have engaged in unethical behavior, he will be promptly reprimanded even if the behavior results primarily in corporate gain” to capture the essence of ethical behaviors.

¹⁸ The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) is a measure of internal consistency reliability for measures with dichotomous choices, first published in 1937. It is analogous to Cronbach's α .

¹⁹ The results of analysis are not reported in the current study but available upon request.

²⁰ A debatable issue notwithstanding, we treat items on the 1~7 Likert scale (e.g. qualification increasing and qualification MA) as continuous variables, allowing us to use Pearson's correlation. Phi correlation values are applied to correlations between special district area, a dichotomous variable, and other variables.

²¹ OLS regression with robust standard errors cannot generate adjusted R square. Adjusted R square in the model with community-focused staff interactions with the governing board as the DV was obtained before we employed robust standard errors.

²² Some variables that are not significant at conventional levels also contribute to model fit; “senior managers having a PA degree” ($p < .072$) contributes to model fit of the “involvement in decision-making” model, and “communication jobs” ($p < .075$) and “charters specifying managers' roles” ($p < .059$) contribute to the model of “board-focused interactions.”

²³ These methods are vast improvements over Mean imputation or median imputation, which have been traditionally used, suffer from underestimated variance, biased correlation, and incorrect representation of the population values (Acuna & Rodriguez, 2004; Howell, 2009; Wayman, 2003). Using MI, dichotomous variables are not imputed and hence the further reported dataset is 194.

²⁴ In the imputed model, with $n=194$, “community interacting jobs” becomes significant at $p < .05$ for the sub-models community research, board-focused interaction and development orientation. In this latter model, “size” also becomes significant at $p < .05$, showing a negative effect of size. Finally, in the sub-model involvement in decision-making, community interacting jobs increases its significance from $p < .05$ to $p < .01$.